

LORD BALTIMORE'S BUNGLE

A Case History

by Lydia Logan

Ecumania didn't begin with Vatican II. It was indulged in by Catholics in colonial America over three centuries ago with all the fervor of the most exuberant ecumaniac today, and with all the results one could expect. Anyone doubting this need only visit St. Mary's City in southern Maryland.

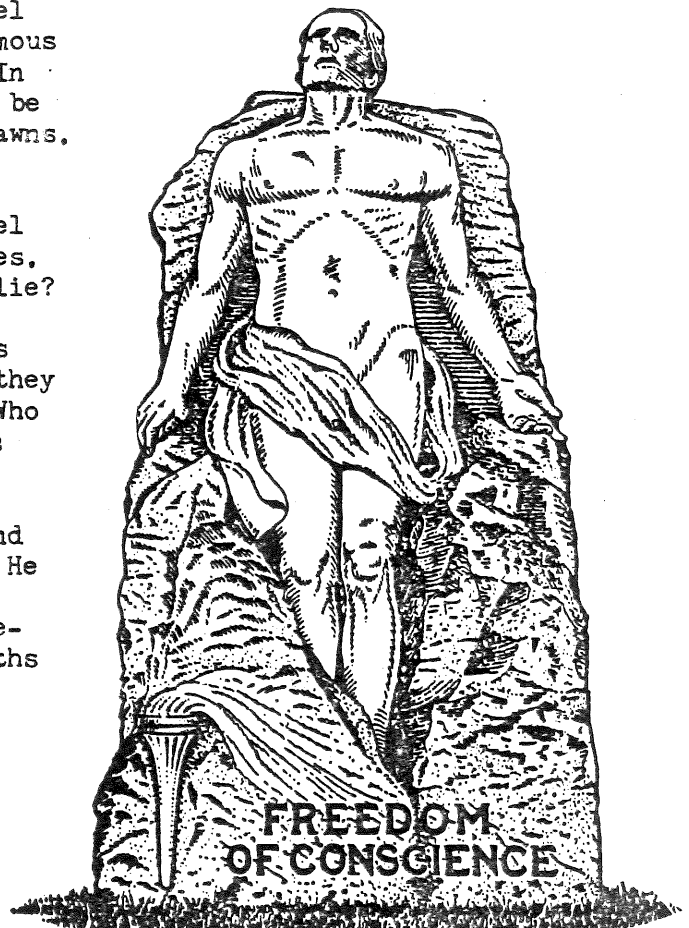
Once the scene of violent confrontations, it is now a peaceful village, tucked within one of the beautiful inlets along St. Mary's River. Here in 1634 the prosperous Catholic Lord Baltimore had invited English Catholics and Protestants alike to establish the first non-sectarian community in the new world, on the site of what was originally an Indian village, renamed in honor of our Lady.

Today the visitor finds the entrance to this hallowed shrine of toleration blatantly guarded by a statue of a young nude Apollo rising to challenge heaven from his quarry stone. Erected by the Maryland counties for their tricentennial in 1934, the thing proclaims a formidable message carved into its base: FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE.

Fear not this immortal guard, and enter into that city where your ancestors thought and did. Search in vain for Catholic buildings of that era. The charming chapel called Trinity near the river is Episcopalian. Famous St. Mary's College to the right is Episcopalian. In fact, dear visitor, St. Mary's would now appear to be a well-endowed Anglican parish resting amid tidy lawns.

Catholic remains do exist . . . quite dead to this world, scattered beneath Trinity and the chapel cemetery marked here and there with a few headstones. As for Lord Baltimore's fond dream, where does it lie? Rather than search on all fours through St. Mary's grounds, it would be best simply to study the deeds and misdeeds of milord and his fellow dreamers as they emerge from the Maryland archives of the period. Who will not learn from history is doomed to repeat it:

George Calvert, first Lord Baltimore, was the son of a Yorkshire Protestant of Flemish descent and his wife Alicia Crossland, an English Protestant. He married Alice Mynne, grand-daughter of Sir Thomas Wrath, Queen Elizabeth's famous commissioner to Ireland. Entering the public service reserved to youths of his station, he had the good fortune to attract the eye of the notorious anti-Catholic Sir Robert Cecil, who rapidly advanced Calvert by making him his private secretary, in due time helping arrange for him a position in Ireland similar to a present day attorney general's.



After his benefactor's death he was appointed Clerk to the Privy Council by James I, whose favorite he became. In 1617, when the king knighted him and elevated him to Secretary of State, Calvert - no coward - openly proclaimed himself a convert to Catholicism and asked to be relieved of this high office.

Apparently remaining nonetheless on the best of terms with the king, Baltimore in fact began pleading with him for land to try out his newest experiment. A previous arctic nightmare which Calvert had created for colonists in Newfoundland in 1620, plus the shipwreck that followed on his futile attempt to bring his own family to Virginia, James remembered all too well. In Newfoundland Calvert had not reckoned on the severe winter conditions, nor on the unfriendly French who resented the English presence and did their best to foment trouble. A few years later the forlorn little group was forced to abandon their plantations and return to England.

In a later attempt in 1629, Lord Baltimore, with his wife and family and some forty colonists, arrived in Jamestown. There he was met by Governor Pott and his Council, who in a most hostile manner demanded that Baltimore take the Oath of Supremacy proclaiming the king head of England's Church. Refusing, Baltimore was again forced to flee home, this time losing his wife and part of his family at sea during the dreary return trip.

It was small wonder that James urged Calvert to retire in comfort to the pleasures of the English countryside under the royal protection. Perhaps it was in an attempt to restrain his schemes that James tempted him with lavish honors, rewarding him for his frank avowal of the Faith by retaining him in the Privy Council and elevating him to the Irish peerage as Baron Baltimore in the County of Longford. Whatever his motives, James I's speech at the time reflects an admiration uncommon among rulers for a faithful adviser:

"We therefore nearly considering in person of our well-beloved and entirely faithful councillor George Calvert, knight, gravity of manners, singular gifts of mind, candor, integrity, and prudence, as well as benignity and urbanity towards all men, and also reflecting in our mind with how great fidelity, diligence and alacrity he has served us. . . ." a speech certainly endorsing Calvert as a man above others among the royal entourage.

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But our experimenter Lord Calvert was not to be put off by encomiums. He pled anew until James granted him lands in America, the charter for which was actually awarded to George Calvert's son Cecil and was confirmed by king Charles I, James' son. Both George Calvert and his royal benefactor had gone to their reward before the charter could be finally approved. By its terms the new Lord Baltimore was made absolute ruler of the new grant. He received extraordinary powers, conferred in a period of history when Catholics were far from popular, by a ruler who was accustomed to be very cautious in his dealings with these persecuted brethren.

According to William T. Russell in Land of Sanctuary, Lord Baltimore and his heirs and successors were granted what amounted to the rights of a king in the new domain, "confirmed in the proprietorship of the land, islands and islets, the lakes, rivers and bays; they were given ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Palatinate and power to ordain, make and enact laws with the advice and assent of the freemen of the province, while in certain cases it lay within their right to legislate independently of the freemen assembled; with them rested the power to appoint judges, justices, magistrates and officers, to pardon and release either before or after judgment had been passed . . . to hold pleas in the execution of the laws if it be necessary to deprive of member or life. . . ."

Our seventeenth century community planner had been indeed declared "absolute Lord of Maryland." How was it that Charles dared shelter a papist so, honoring him with choice lands in the new world? What was the real relationship between the Calverts and the royal family, that a king should show such open favoritism when he himself was suspected of Catholic leanings? Were the two families bound in fact by secret Catholic sympathies?

In History of a Palatinate, Maryland historian William Hand Browne records a curious bit of information linking the Calverts with the execution of Charles I: "Shortly before, the Close Committee of Parliament held a secret meeting at which Baltimore and two or three other Catholics were present." As a result of the meeting they "sent a message to Charles in prison that if he would recede from his firm stand and own himself to have been in some measure in the wrong, they would save his life and if possible his crown."

Presumably Charles was executed by hostile forces in Parliament, his downfall linked with his treatment of them, but the English historian Macauley suggests that his death was not without religious overtones. One does wonder that Baltimore, who had publicly thrown off the yoke of political office, should be included in the major decision regarding Charles' execution. What sort of stand did Calvert wish his royal friend to recede from? Was it perhaps religious? Dare Charles and his father appear less than friendly to the Calverts, the lands and honors a smokescreen, bribes to silence the Calverts about their secret devotion to the old religion?

Charles carried to the grave the true state of affairs between the two families, as well as the nature of the firm stand he was asked to disavow, but in a revealing episode after his execution, his son Charles -- who died a Catholic -- considered Calvert a rebel, for according to Browne, the king proceeded to grant "lands given by his father to Calvert to Sir William Davenant the English poet. Davenant actually set sail for the province but was seized in the British channel by a Parliament cruiser and his plans brought to an untimely end." Did Charles suspect Calvert of playing a double game?

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Whatever the reason, King James and his son Charles I had awarded a most generous charter, which Cecil Calvert thought best to watch closely by remaining in England near Parliament, sending his younger brother Leonard, then 26 years old, to head the long awaited expedition to claim Mary-Land. In 1633 Leonard and his band of pioneers boarded the Ark, a 72-foot ship of 400 tons, and the Dove, a smaller boat, at Gravesend, England, where a Mr. Watkins, an official of the realm, administered an oath to all, about one hundred and twenty-eight all told.

According to Russell this oath of allegiance was one simply recognizing the king as ruler of England. He assumes that the Calverts took this oath quite frequently, but avoided the Oath of Supremacy which acknowledged the king as head of the Church. It's interesting, however, that Fr. Henry More, said to be a descendant of Sir Thomas More, and one of Leonard's passengers, states that by far the greater number of passengers aboard the ships were heretics. By "heretic" did he mean the many Protestants aboard, or could he have been referring to those Catholics who accepted Mr. Watkins' oath without question?

Was this oath the innocuous one Russell assumes it was, or was it actually the Oath of Supremacy, which no faithful Catholic could take at the risk of apostasy? "This supremacy," says Macauley, "was nothing less than the whole power of the keys. The king was to be the pope of his kingdom, vicar of God, the expositor of Catholic verity, the channel of sacramental graces. He arrogated to himself the right of deciding dogmatically what was orthodox doctrine and what was heresy, of drawing up and imposing confessions of faith, and of giving religious instruction to his people. The king was the way, the overseer, the very shepherd whom the Holy Ghost had appointed and to whom the expressions of St. Paul applied."

If such was Mr. Watkins' oath, could Catholics with qualms of conscience have avoided it? As a matter of record, many passengers, both Jesuits and laymen, did not board at Gravesend, but at the Isle of Wight off the coast, where they were able to by-pass Mr. Watkins entirely. It is quite possible that those who availed themselves of this stratagem were the more conscientious Catholics of the new colony.

Once past the Isle, the two ships separated during a severe storm. They were eventually re-united and on the feast of the Annunciation in March, 1634, the colonists reached St. Clement's Island off the coast of Maryland, where a Mass was offered in thanksgiving

for a safe journey. An eye-witness left a detailed account of the sacred event, which could only have been carried out by devotees of the old religion:

"After we had completed the Sacrifice, we took on our shoulders a great cross which we had hewn out of a tree, and advancing in order to the appointed place with the assistance of the Governor (Leonard Calvert) and his associates and the other Catholics we erected a trophy to Christ the Savior, humbly reciting on our bended knees the litanies of the Holy Savior, with great emotion."

After a brief stay on St. Clement's the colonists searched for more secure lands in the territory of the Yacomicos with whom they bartered for the choice green areas. Oddly enough the Yacomicos were only too glad to give these, gladly acceding to their wishes, trading half the town immediately and offering the other half after the harvest. "The settlers and the savages," cites Russell, "then promised each other to live in peace and concord, and thus with a solemn covenant of faith to be kept and mutual assistance rendered was founded upon justice, peace and charity the little town of Saint Maries."

A secure charter, grateful passengers, abundance of fertile lands and Indians bent only upon pleasing the white men made for a situation which seemed most extraordinary to Fr. Andrew White, one of the Jesuit settlers. In fact he considered it miraculous "that barbarous men a few days before arrayed in arms against us should so willingly surrender themselves to us like lambs and deliver up to us themselves and their property. The finger of God is in this and He purposes some great benefit to this Nation."

Was Father White aware that sixty-four years before, two Spanish Jesuit priests and six Brothers had come from Florida to attempt to convert the Indians in Tidewater Virginia and Maryland? Their mission was destroyed and all were murdered by Powhatan, including their Provincial Fr. Segura. The blood of these martyrs may well have been the seed of future conversions and the miraculous submission of these wild children of the forest. Possibly a willing remnant remained after sixty-four years, yearning to learn more from the holy white men who had sought to instruct their grandparents. Whatever the explanation, the relationship between the colonists and the Indians around St. Mary's City was on the whole a peaceful, joyous one, very dissimilar to that in other colonies, where the red men were exterminated rather than converted. Their descendants are to be found in the area to this day.

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Once the colonists began to cultivate the land around the city and to form prosperous plantations, Leonard, a true Englishman in his love of government, realized that some form of governing body was needed to fulfill the terms of the charter and regulate the practical day to day living of the colonists. One of his first official acts, in 1635, was to form an assembly to implement the wishes of his father and his elder brother. And there can be no doubt that George Calvert had been desirous that the officials of his domain impart justice without regard to the religious persuasion of the parties involved.

Following his brother's directives, Leonard insisted on the colonial officials taking an oath reflecting this tolerant spirit of the Calverts. Several pledges of similar wording may have been used during this early period, but one recorded by Russell conveys the general idea well enough: "I will not by myself or any other person directly or indirectly trouble or molest or discountenance any person believing in Jesus Christ for or in respect to religion." Though this pledge would have excluded Jews, historians seem to agree that their numbers were too few to be mentioned. Nor is any persecution of them recorded.

The spirit behind the pledge is reflected in many of the court decisions of the time. The so-called Lewis Case is often cited as an example: William Lewis, a Catholic, had a heavy dispute with his Protestant servants about the sort of services they were holding among themselves on Sundays. As they had no minister, it was their custom to read aloud from a book of Protestant sermons which were very anti-Catholic in tone, and abusive of the Pope and the Jesuits, referred to as Antichrists. Lewis would become very angry at this,

although never physically violent. He was nevertheless brought to court for calling Protestant ministers "ministers of the devil," and for arguing openly about religious matters. The court fined him 300 pounds of tobacco and placed him under bond of 3,000 pounds more to keep him quiet. No chastisement of the Protestant servants is recorded.

A certain Fr. Thomas Copley, alias Philip Fisher, a Jesuit present at the proceedings, publicly chided Lewis for being so stern! Perhaps the Father felt it his duty to keep peace in the young colony, but one wonders at this distance from the event whether it was not also his duty to defend the Faith whenever it was under open attack -- especially in a Catholic colony. He seems to have been far advanced in situation ethics.

He is a mysterious figure, apparently leading a life curiously free of the many entanglements and hardships his fellow Jesuits soon had their fill of in the settlement. It is a matter of record that he was related to no less a person than Queen Elizabeth, one of his older cousins being moreover her godchild. Was this perhaps why he seemed not to have to worry about the Oath of Supremacy, arriving two years after the Ark and the Dove?

As Nevils states in Miniatures of Georgetown, Fr. Copley on arrival was able to claim forty-eight men as his portion in the construction of the colony, entitling him to 10,000 acres of land. Nevils admits his position was peculiar. Although a professed member of the Society of Jesus, he retained his worldly rank, by which he was recognized both in England and Maryland. Certainly he had powerful friends at court.

Perhaps there is some simple explanation, but it does strike one as strange that whereas Fr. White boarded at the Isle of Wight to avoid the Oath, Fr. Copley apparently left from an English port two years later without difficulty. When the official persecutions against the Catholics eventually broke out in the colony, Fr. White and Fr. Copley were both carried off to England in chains, but whereas the former languished in prison and later died a physically broken old man in Belgium, Copley turned up again in the colonies. What sort of Jesuit could have enjoyed such freedom? What were his objectives?

One might mention here that Copley Hall on the campus of Georgetown University in the nation's capital was named after him. Although he didn't live to see this first seat of Catholic learning in the United States, he worked hard for its establishment, having in fact chosen the site on which it now stands. (It's interesting that his first choice was that of the U.S. Capitol's.) Founded in 1789 after the Revolution -- by Jesuits acting as "the incorporated clergy of Maryland" under Bishop John Carroll (S.J.) during the time the Society was suppressed -- the University has always propagated the spirit of tolerance first launched on these shores by the Copleys and Calverts. No doubt they would have approved the University's official seal - the American eagle clutching the Cross in one claw and the globe overlaid with a masonic (?) compass in the other, thereby proclaiming equal rights to science and religion:



"Religious liberty," says Russell, "was the statute paramount" in Maryland, "guarded by the Catholic authorities with the most absolute fidelity and with the most jealous care. They seem to have had an extreme sensitiveness concerning any, even the least, infringement of its provisions, and justice moved swiftly to punish the offender who rashly dared to assail the cardinal principle of the colony's foundation. Thus was the sacred fire of religious freedom guarded by the Catholics, who had first kindled the spark upon the shores of the New World."

In 1642, when the prominent Catholic landowner Thomas Gerard was accused of taking the key to the "ecumenical" chapel where the Protestants were holding services, together with their books, Dr. Gerard was found guilty of a misdemeanor. He had to return books and key, and furthermore "relinquish all title to them or the house, and should pay for a fine 500 lbs. of tobacco towards the maintenance of the first minister as should arrive."

In the same spirit, Calvert denied the Jesuits ownership of lands given to them by the Indians, a decision in which he was warmly backed by Rome. This eventually resulted in a Maryland law to the effect that, "No ecclesiastic may sit in the General Assembly, no gift, sale or devise of land nor gift nor sale of goods or chattels to take effect after the death of the donor or seller can be effective without ratification by the Assembly." In Maryland, it would seem Catholics were the first to discriminate against Catholics, so true is it that our worst enemies are always those of our own household.

Was Baltimore fearful of arousing the leaders of the Reformation in England by overt favoritism to Catholics? Was he in a desperate situation, or was he led by spiritual forces stronger than he knew? Being of a noble, rather sentimental nature, did he sincerely believe that by insisting on strict separation of Church and state he would eventually level all prejudices and win over the opposition? What is the real explanation for his endorsement of St. Mary's as a shared church where all faiths might meet for worship? For his tolerant, not to say pro-Protestant, courts? His dread of church-owned property?

Whatever the explanation, it's clear now that all the seeds of the later Americanist heresy were not only planted, but carefully nurtured from the beginning in the Union's one Catholic state. After Leonard's death, when active persecution of the Catholics began, the lady now characterized as Maryland's first women's lib candidate, Margaret Brent, was driven to beg for a vote. Known as a staunch Catholic, quite capable of foreseeing the grave problems in store for Catholics now governed by a Protestant majority in the Assembly, besides being of a strong, unyielding character, could she have stemmed the tide? We shall never know, for she was firmly denied suffrage, whereupon she left in disgust for Virginia a few years later.

Had our ecumenical visionary been more discriminating in his choice of guests, at least Ingle, a common pirate, would not have been allowed to disturb the settlement: "Determined to cause trouble, Richard Ingle brought an armed ship, the Reformation (!), in February of 1645, with goods entrusted to him by Cornwaleys, a leading Maryland colonist, valued at 200 lbs. and with a commission from Parliament for carrying food . . . to the colonists in sympathy with the Parliamentary party. St. Mary's was then taken and many of the members imprisoned. Those who supported Lord Baltimore were despoiled of their whole estates and sent away as banished persons out of the province. Those who remained were plundered of all livelihood."

In a shocking reversal of his peaceful policy, certainly embarrassing for him, Leonard Calvert was forced to re-enter St. Mary's City in 1646 with a small force of armed men to regain his own kingdom. Firmly committed to the recovery of his authority, he cleared the area of bad rubbish. But did he then seek to fortify St. Mary's, to guard the faithful huddled there under the protection of the Queen of Heaven from further depredations? On the contrary, he then invited the rebellious Puritans from Virginia to settle within the Catholic confines!

Is it possible he was merely attempting to create a smokescreen? Was he incredibly naive? Or was he simply hell-bent on establishing the ecumenical utopia which he was convinced would succeed if only given time? Either unable to learn from bitter experience or deeply infected by the pluralism already corrupting Christendom, Calvert turned his Assembly over to all -- Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Quakers, and now Puritans -- a full century before the official democratic takeover in 1776.

His next move was to post a new act on religion stipulating, "No persons professing belief in Jesus Christ shall be in any way troubled, molested or discountenanced for or in respect of his or her religion, nor in the free exercise thereof." Although the document mentions our Lady and disapproves of blasphemers, it exudes religious indifferentism far more

than any commitment to preserve the Faith at all costs. We need not be surprised that the colony's ethical expert Fr. Copley is rumored to have actually drafted this document.

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And how did the Puritans repay Calvert and Copley? After gaining control of the Maryland assembly, they published another act on religion in 1654. "That none who professed and exercised the Popish (commonly called Roman Catholic) religion, could be protected in the province by the laws of England . . . but were to be restrained from the exercise thereof." That Catholics alone were singled out is clear, for the act further stated that, "Such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship or discipline publicly held forth, should not be restrained from but protected in the profession of faith and the exercise of their religion." Any brand of Christian heresy, yes; the true Faith, no. The Faith which had founded the colony was now officially proscribed.

Of the persecutions unleashed by the Puritans and later by the Church of England, the less said the better. As Charles Carroll, a Catholic from Maryland who signed the Declaration of Independence, remarked regarding the harsh treatment meted out between 1654 and 1776, "We remember and we forgive."

This was not entirely political expediency. Catholics during this dreadful period showed real charity and goodness towards their Protestant neighbors despite loss of homes, goods and the Mass. Jesuits in secular garb were able to convert many Protestants, who turned in disgust from the kind of ministers being sent to them from England, and who were avid for the truth and some good example. This makes a most unflattering chapter in our nation's history for the Reformers, but certainly a heroic one for many Catholics who remained in the colony and whose descendants can be found there today. Others, like Margaret Brent, left for less hostile surroundings. Those who settled to the west in Emmitsburg had the good fortune to have their posterity taught by St. Elizabeth Seton.

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It goes without saying that if the Calverts had copied the tactics of the Anglicans in Virginia they would certainly have fared better in keeping the reins of government in Catholic hands. Fanatical Puritans had become such a problem in Virginia that the Anglicans there had felt no qualms about driving them wholesale from the area: "For the preservation of the purity of doctrine and unity of the Church, it is enacted that all ministers whatsoever, which shall reside in the colony are to be conformed to the orders and constitution of the Church of England and not otherwise to be permitted to preach or teach publicly or privately and that the Governor and Council do take care that all non-conformists upon notice of them shall be compelled to depart the colony with all convenience."

Thus do the heretical children of this world ever seem wiser than the children of light. They are concerned not only for political control, but also "for the preservation of the purity of doctrine and unity" of their church, which the Calverts evidently considered entirely secondary to the all-important principle of religious liberty. Virginia acted as did almost all the thirteen colonies until the masonically inspired "enlightenment" imposed freedom of conscience on all consciences without discrimination in 1776.

Had the Lords Calvert done as other governors, there would surely have been martyrs. With our Lady's able assistance, however, the Faith could perhaps have retained its one political foothold among the English. St. Mary's would have been truly a city of God rather than one of man. Could not a thoroughly Catholic community have bucked the Revolution itself as Canada did, by creating in Maryland a counter-revolutionary center for the widespread loyalist sentiment?

Who knows? Unfortunately the Maryland Catholics under Archbishop Carroll welcomed the Revolution with open arms, for it guaranteed them the same freedom of worship they had held out to others. The founders of St. Mary's are now heroes of the Revolution. The Calvert family itself, however, didn't survive to see the triumph of their dream, which is now the

law of the land. Degenerating physically and spiritually after Leonard's death, it fell prey to divorce and heresy, becoming extinct with the licentious Frederick, last of the six Lords Calvert, who died without legitimate issue in 1771.

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